

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden  
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce  
“Americans at Risk: Manipulation and Deception in the Digital Age”  
January 8, 2020**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

Good morning, and welcome to our witnesses. I want to first thank Chair Schakowsky for organizing today’s incredibly insightful hearing – which is focused on deception online.

For many years, the internet has been a force for good. It provides consumers with unbelievable access to unlimited information, goods and services, and people – no matter where they are in the world.

But, as with anything, the internet presents bad actors and those seeking to harm others ample opportunities to manipulate users and take advantage of consumers, which often tend to be some of our most vulnerable populations. Arguably, the digital ecosystem is such that harmful acts are easily exacerbated and, as we all know, false information or fake videos spread at break-neck speeds. That is why when I was Chairman of this Committee, we tackled platform responsibility head-on.

Last Congress, we held hearings and legislated on:

- Online platforms not fulfilling their “Good Samaritan” obligations, especially when it comes to online human sex trafficking.

- Companies' use of algorithms and the impact such algorithms have on influencing consumer behavior;
- Improving and expanding the reach of broadband services so rural and urban, consumers of all ages, can benefit in a connected world;
- Explaining the online advertising ecosystem;
- Preservation and promotion of cross-border data flows; and
- Other related issues we face in the connected world such as cybersecurity, Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, to name just a few.

We also invited the heads of tech industry to come explain their practices in this hearing room. Two of the committee's highest profile hearings in recent memory were focused squarely on platform responsibility.

I brought in the CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, to answer tough questions on the Cambridge Analytica debacle, as well as provide the committee with more insight into how Facebook collects consumer information, and what Facebook does with that information.

I also welcomed the CEO of Twitter, Jack Dorsey, to provide the committee with more insight into how Twitter operates, decisions Twitter makes on its platform, and how such decisions impact consumers, specifically so voices don't feel silenced.

I am pleased that Chairman Pallone brought in the CEO of Reddit last year and hope the trend will continue as we understand this ever-evolving ecosystem from those that sit on top of it. This hearing today helps with that as this group of experts shine a light on questionable practices that I hope can yield further fruitful results. Such efforts often lead to swifter action than any government action can.

Following our series of hearings, there is proof that some companies are cleaning up their platforms. For example, following our hearing on the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Facebook made significant changes to its privacy policies. Facebook reformatted its privacy settings to make it more accessible and user friendly; eased the ability for its users to control and delete their information; took down malicious entities on its platform; and, invested in programs to preserve and promote legitimate local news operations. And during that hearing Rep. McKinley pushed Mr. Zuckerberg on specific ads he'd seen illegally selling opioids without prescription on Facebook. As a result, Facebook removed the ads.

Also notable – through the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism – platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, have been working together to tackle terrorist content and, importantly, disrupt violent extremists' ability to promote themselves, share propaganda, and exploit digital platforms.

Now this is not to suggest the online ecosystem is perfect – it is far from it. Can these companies be doing more to clean up their platforms? Of course, they can, and I expect them to.

So, let me be very clear: this hearing should serve as an important reminder to all online platforms that we are watching them closely. We want to ensure we do not harm innovation, but as we have demonstrated in a bipartisan fashion in the past, when we see issues or identify clear harms to consumers and we do not see online entities taking appropriate action, we are prepared to act.

Thank you. I yield back.